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Charlotte Hodes, Untitled, 2007, inkjet with lasercut, 27½ x 15¼ in. (70 x 40 cm), printed and lasercut at the Centre for Fine Print Research, University of the West of England (artwork © Charlotte Hodes)

Ruth Pelzer-Montada

The Attraction of Print: Notes on the Surface of the (Art) Print

This paper originated in a presentation for the session *Convergent Theories: Printmaking, Photography and Digital Media* chaired by Kevin Haas at the CAA Annual Conference in Boston in 2006.

1. Terry Smith, ed., *Impossible Presence: Surface and Screen in the Photogenic Era* (Sydney: Power Institute, 2001); Richard Shiff, "Realism of Low Resolution, Digitisation and Modern Painting," in *Impossible Presence*, 125–56; Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), esp. chapter 1.

2. Gillian Saunders and Rosie Miles, *Prints Now: Directions and Definitions* (London: V & A Publishing, 2006), 8.

3. In addition to the sources mentioned above, see Richard Shusterman, *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); and David Joselit, "Notes on Surface: Towards a Genealogy of Flatness," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 292–308.

4. On the notion of spectacularization, see the familiar concept of the "spectacle" in Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle* (1968; Detroit: Black and Red, 1973). As Sadie Plant wrote, "The spectacle is a society which continually declares: 'Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear.'" Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International and After* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 13. "Appears" here implies to rise to the surface (of visibility). On the concept of new media, see *Web.Studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age*, ed. David Gauntlett and Ross Horsley (London: Arnold, dist. Oxford University Press, 2004), and the website www.newmedia-studies.com/.

5. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 2006), 216.

This essay was prompted by my own experiences and interests as a printmaker. It examines the surface of the contemporary art print as a means to position printmaking in relation to contemporary painting, photography, and new media. Terry Smith's differentiation between "viscerality" and "enervation," Richard Shiff's account of the changing perception of the surface in modernity, and the concept of the "haptic" as developed by Laura Marks with regard to experimental video will serve to trace similarities and differences between print and other contemporary media and to conceptualize aspects of the surface of print.¹ In particular, I shall be asking whether there is a distinct haptic quality or haptics of and to the print.

I am using the word "printmaking" as a shortcut for a practice that encompasses different constituencies and institutions, from printmaking taught and increasingly researched in institutions of higher education, to open-access workshops, print publishing, and gallery art. The

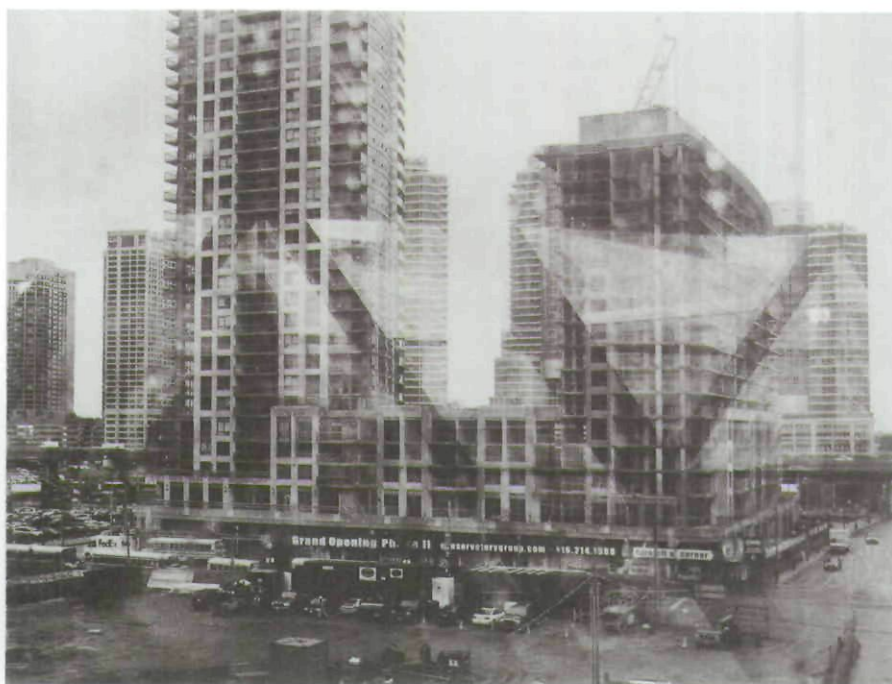
latter two seem to bifurcate into the work of well-known, "blue-chip" artists on the one hand (usually executed by "master" printers or technicians) and artists working exclusively as printmakers. The former mainly work in other media, and printmaking constitutes only one mode of their artistic production. The latter tend to form a constituency of their own with exhibitions, galleries, and publications that may intersect with high-end art, but often do not. As one of the educational guides at the Kassel Documenta recently put it in a private conversation: "I don't know of one well-known artist who is exclusively a printmaker."

Nevertheless, as Rosie Miles and Gillian Saunders in their 2006 survey of the contemporary art print point out, "Print is now a central part of many artists' activity, the equal of their output in other media, conceived as integral or complementary to it."² But in critical writing on prints, the printed nature of the work is often taken for granted. As a printmaker, I am concerned with the theorizing of printmaking from within printmaking and the location of printmaking and the art print within the current media debate. This essay aims to contribute to raising the critical profile of printmaking in contemporary writing on art.

As an art of the surface, printmaking may be closely affiliated to the everyday of printed matter such as posters, advertising, and packaging. It both draws on and seeks to differentiate itself from such surfaces. Crucial to the discussion is the flatness of the printed surface, which mobilizes a powerful cultural dichotomy, namely that between surface and depth. Put simply, "surface" tends to be conflated with the superficial and the artificial, "depth" with their counterparts, "deep" meaning and the real. The cultural connotations and hierarchy between these two tropes run at many levels through Western thinking.³ Take, for example, the often almost hysterical pronouncements regarding the loss of depth or the real in the face of spectacularization, especially in the context of new media.⁴ Print can be therefore considered as a site in which cultural debates about surface and depth and their affiliated connotations are played out. Paying attention to the surface of the print will lead, I hope, to a more differentiated assessment of the often merely dystopian views. Such an examination is based on the assumption that "systems of meaning [are] coded in [these] materials and means of production."⁵



Kevin Haas, YYZ06-14, 2006, photogravure, 11¼ x 23 in. (29.8 x 58.4 cm) (artwork © Kevin Haas)



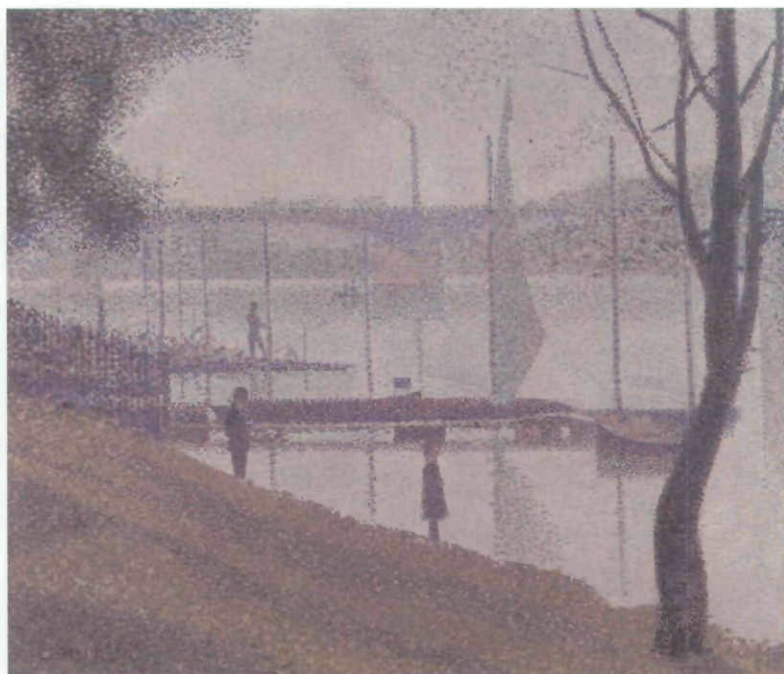
6. See, for example, Paul Coldwell, "Interrogating the Surface," presented at the second Impact International Printmaking Conference, Helsinki, Finland, August 29–September 2, 2001, available at www2.uiah.fi/conferences/impact/. See also the exhibition with the same title as the paper, curated by Coldwell at the Atkinson Gallery, Somerset, UK, in November 2001. Coldwell was also instrumental in the 2003 *Digital Surface International Conference* at Tate Britain. See in the United States the exhibition *Digital: Printmaking Now* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, 2001.

7. See Coldwell. In the United Kingdom context the argument for a more conceptually driven digital practice has been made by Naren Barfield and others; see Naren Barfield, Raz Barfield, and George Whale, "Defying Convention: Emergent Print Practices in Digital Printmaking," *Point: Art and Design Research Journal* 1, no. 12 (2001): 4–14. Ruth Weisberg, in an influential paper from 1986, has argued that the process of (what is now) "conventional" printmaking lends itself to a conceptual or "cerebral" approach. Weisberg, "The Syntax of the Print: In Search of an Aesthetic Context," *The Tamarind Papers: A Journal of the Fine Print* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 58. While there may be a rationale for this argument, in my

Generally, recent writing on the subject of the surface in art and culture does not consider the artistic print. Marks's work on the surface, for example, is focused on video art and experimental film, while David Joselit is primarily focused on the trajectory of modernist painting's purported "flatness" in post-modernism. Within printmaking there is awareness of the importance of surface, especially in light of printmaking's intersection with digital media.⁶ Accompanied by a renewed flaring-up of the question of the "originality" of the print (thought buried since the 1960s), the flatness of the inkjet-printed surface has been above all a matter of concern. Paul Coldwell, for example, has noted the "uniformity of the surface" of digital prints in comparison to traditional forms of printmaking due to the fact that the technology of such printers is "aimed at matching the surface quality of analogue photography." He also speaks of the "need" of his own prints to "have rich physical qualities" and "to create a physical presence within the print." The latter is achieved by using "traditional" printmaking methods, such as etching or lithography, in a practice that encompasses digital methods. There has also been an argument for a more conceptually driven practice facilitated by digital media.⁷ But, as Kevin Haas has argued: "Debates over how an image exists within culture and how it signifies its meaning, have typically taken place outside the discourses of printmaking." He also confirms my earlier point about the necessity for a theorization of print when he notes that "Despite the significant role printmaking has played in art throughout the 20th century and currently, it has not shared the outpouring of theoretical writing which has been devoted to photography in the last several decades."⁸

At the same time, he expresses some concern that the discourse of printmaking not simply converge into the larger discourse of photography and digital media. My discussion of the surface of the print aims to tease out some of the intricacies of the relationship between these fields from the vantage point of

Georges-Pierre Seurat, *Bridge at Courbevoie*, 1886–87, oil on canvas, 18¼ x 21¼ in. (46.4 x 55.3 cm). Courtauld Institute Gallery, London (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Samuel Courtauld Trust, the Courtauld Gallery)



view, a conceptual approach does not rely on the medium or the media an artist chooses, technical or otherwise, however crucial to his or her concept they may be. I concede that my concept of the conceptual may be narrower than that of the two authors mentioned.

8. Kevin Haas, "Convergent Theories: Printmaking, Photography and Digital Media," session proposal for the CAA Annual Conference, Boston, February 22–25, 2006, available online at www.accumulated.org/special_projects/CAA2006.html. The lack of theory in contemporary printmaking has been noted by others in the field, most notably Kathryn Reeves in her "The Revision of Printmaking," first Impact International Printmaking Conference, Bristol, UK, September 22–25, 1999, published in *Impact Proceedings 1999*, a CD by the Centre for Fine Print Research, Faculty of Art, Design and Media. The CD is available from the Centre at the University of the West of England, Bower Ashton Campus, Kennel Lodge Rd., Bristol BS3 2JT, UK.

9. Examples are numerous. One may suffice: At the fourth Impact International Printmaking Conference in Berlin-Poznan, Germany/Poland, September 5–10, 2005, there was a demonstration of a wax silkscreen technique that creates beautifully rich and dense surfaces. Not only the technique, but also the name of the workshop, "Hand Print Workshop," indicates a yearning for authenticity that is affiliated to the notion of touch and is connoted by the involvement of the hand, communicated through the surface of the print. See my article "Technology versus Concept," *Contemporary Impressions* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 21–25.

printmaking. As a writer based in the United Kingdom, my visual references relate mainly to work produced here.

Despite their differences and the changes they have undergone within their own history, "traditional" printmaking processes are characterized by a flat surface. Let us briefly remind ourselves of the "fate" of the printed surface in the art of the twentieth century. As is well known, modernism contrasted printmaking, not least its mechanically produced flat surface (a signifier of its reproductive character), with the "full" flatness of the surface of the modernist painting. Pop art made a virtue of the superficiality of the print's surface by adopting the flattest of commercial printing techniques at the time, screenprinting, thereby aligning itself with the culture of mass production and the commodity. Subsequent practice can be characterized as veering between two main poles. One strand of practice foregrounds printmaking's imitative structure, often rejecting autographic means in favor of reproductive ones. Here, one can detect a strong convergence with the photographic. The other strand attempts to suppress flatness by emphasizing the materiality or "touch" of the surface.

A major proportion of the content of printmaking journals and conferences consists of reports and demonstrations of new or altered techniques of the surface. While this is understandable, it could be argued that there is an overconcern with, even a fetishization of techniques of the surface. One could read this preoccupation with techniques as a compensation for printmaking's marginalization within the larger context of art within modernism. The indicators of the craft of printmaking, its enriched surface qualities, signal the superior values of the artist's touch and, by implication, the authentic and the "real" (in the non-Lacanian sense).⁹

While it is true that, for some printmakers, the concern with the surface and its complexity serves as a route to authenticity, this need not be so. Here, a

Paul Thirkell, *Tree of Life Number 2*
(*Alchemy and Botany Series*), 2007, photopolymer gravure, 16¼ x 12¼ in. (43 x 31 cm)
(artwork © Paul Thirkell)

comparison with the materiality of the modern painted surface is helpful, for both its actual makeup and its connotations have experienced multiple shifts, especially as a result of the emergence of photography. With reference to the artistic surface in the twentieth century, the art historian Terry Smith speaks of a trend toward "viscerality" on the one hand, and "enervation" on the other, where viscerality is understood as the emphasis on the materiality of the artistic surface while enervation describes its opposite, represented by the preponderance, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, of images on screens or screenlike images.¹⁰ How may the artistic print be located between the viscerality and enervation of the surface as suggested by Smith?

An article by the art historian Richard Shiff about the surface in the work of Georges-Pierre Seurat and Chuck Close proves instructive in this regard.¹¹ The main gist of Shiff's argument is that both the construction as well as the perception of the materiality of a surface changes historically. His investigation explains how this change has occurred in modernity in relation to the painted surface of certain realist painters: A painting or drawing by Seurat, for instance, appeared wholly mechanical to his contemporaries, and the question was raised at the time as to whether the work might have even been executed automatically, as with the surfaces of photography or printmaking, namely lithography. Yet today, at a time when screen surfaces abound, Seurat's painting "becomes subject to an ironic reversal"; it appears "organic" rather than "automatic," imbued with presence or the evidence of the artist's individual marking.¹² Further, as Shiff argues, the modernist suppression of the hand in painting does not necessarily result in the "dematerialization" of the painted surface, as in Seurat's or in Close's more recent work, but can equally rest in such "noisy" surfaces as Jasper Johns's encaustic paintings of, for example, the American flag.¹³ Shiff concludes: "The meanings of photography and painting evolve as a result of their interaction." Now the "interference" comes from electronic media "to which all other media must be compared." "Video exposes the material thickness of thin photographic emulsion and does the same to any thin, emulsion-like surface of painting. Our response is a changed sense of the materiality of images."¹⁴

The implication of Shiff's analysis for the construction and perception of the printed surface is that today—unlike in the heyday of modernism—the formerly mechanical surface of the print can appear similarly rich in presence. Following Shiff, one can apply his general remarks on the changed perception of the materiality of the painted image through new image technologies to the different modes of printmaking: newer printing technologies such as the advent of "enervated" screenprinting made the surfaces achieved by the older techniques look "visceral" in comparison. If we simplify, for the moment, the differences in printmaking techniques and the varying consistencies of printmaking inks, then its multiple, complex layering is what constitutes the particular surface of the print. It is the condensation through different layers that accounts for the materiality, even the tactility of the print. Today, older technologies of print (including, ironically, screenprinting) yield a tactile, "fleshy" surface in comparison to the mean slimness of the digital print.

In the digitally printed image, the construction of surface through layering that is so familiar to printmakers becomes virtual and assumes a greater dematerialization than print ever before experienced. In yet another ironic reversal—

10. Terry Smith, "Enervation, Viscerality, The Fate of the Image in Modernity," introduction to Smith, 1–39.

11. Shiff, 125–56.

12. *Ibid.*, 141.

13. *Ibid.*, 150. This was possible because the imagery was already familiar.

14. *Ibid.*, 156.



especially given the widespread popularity of the once “enervated” screen-print—when a digitally produced image takes on material form, it is not the materiality of the surface that is in the way, for there is not enough of it compared to conventional printmaking modes. We are all familiar with the “dead” flatness of certain ink-jet prints. The print curator and art historian Stephen Goddard, for instance, has asked whether differences in the output on paper as opposed to the screen indicate the potential emergence of a “rift.” He concludes that it seems unlikely such a chasm would arise; a more likely development—for multiple economic, social, and cultural reasons—will be the coexistence of both, and he predicts: “In all probability printmaking’s center will hold . . .”¹⁵ Much of the research carried out by the Centre for Fine Print Research in Bristol, United Kingdom, has concerned the adaptation or alteration of commercial technology, such as digital printers, to suit the needs of artists both in the scale and quality of the output. A recent exhibition by the center, *Committed to Print* at the Royal Academy of the West of England in Bristol, demonstrated the tactility of digital prints, which are now often almost indistinguishable from traditionally printed work. One printmaking educator from New Zealand told me that, technical changes notwithstanding, his students overcome the “thinness” of a digitally produced work by using digital printing techniques in a manner similar to traditional modes of printing—i.e., by printing separate layers. On the other hand, and despite such no doubt widespread practices as well as changes in the output of digital printers (here, too, more will no doubt follow), a fellow printmaker and printmaking tutor at Edinburgh College of Art expressed reservations: that digitally produced and printed images which appear to adopt the syntax of, say, a woodcut or a lithograph still only look like the real thing and function merely as a quotation of said techniques, is evident in the paucity of the more subtle codings and unique syntax that such traditional modes allow. As Shiff comments toward the end of his essay, while new materials “unmask the imperfections” of the previous ones, “touch returns.”¹⁶

One way to speak about touch in regard to the surface of the print is by considering it in terms of its “haptic” qualities. This term, originally conceived by the art historian Alois Riegl, has been taken up by the film and video critic Laura U. Marks. She differentiates between haptic and optical modes of seeing.

Haptic perception is usually defined as the combination of tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies. In haptic *visuality*, the eyes themselves function like organs of touch. Haptic *visuality*, a term contrasted to optical *visuality*, draws from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinesthetics.¹⁷

It is not surprising that in haptic *visuality* “the viewer’s body is more obviously involved in the process of seeing than is the case with optical *visuality*.”¹⁸ In Marks’s interpretation of Riegl, optical representation is seen as

a general shift toward an ideal of abstraction. The long-term consequences of this shift include Renaissance perspective, which reinforced the visual mastery of an individual viewer. . . . Optical representation makes possible a greater distance between beholder and object . . .¹⁹

15. Stephen Goddard, “Printmaking: Will the Center Hold?” in *In-Print: Evolution in Contemporary Printmaking*, exh. cat. (Hull, UK: Ferens Gallery, 2001), 11–14. For further examples of the interrelationship between new and older print technologies in the United States, see the exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art mentioned in n. 9 and also the contribution of Dorothy Simpson Krause to the panel “Convergent Theories, Printmaking, Photography and Digital Media.”

16. Shiff, 144.

17. Marks, 2 (italics in orig.).

18. *Ibid.*, 3.

19. *Ibid.*, 5.

Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance*, 1988,
still from color video installation, sound, 15 min.,
produced by Western Front Video, Vancouver
(artwork © Mona Hatoum; image provided by Jay
Jopling/White Cube, London)



Marks stresses that the difference between these modes is a “matter of degree.” Not only are they both involved in most processes of seeing, we also need them both. She says, “It is hard to look closely at a lover’s skin with optical vision; it is hard to drive a car with haptic vision.”²⁰ More recently, she has added that we can choose between haptic and optical looking. In her example of driving a car, this would be focusing on the windscreen itself (haptic) as opposed to looking through it to focus on the road (optical).²¹ This example further demonstrates the need for (and the alternation between) both modes.

Of interest here is the notion that visual images themselves may have haptic qualities. However, as in her general remarks about haptic and optical visibility, Marks says that with regard to film and video there are no modes of visibility that are totally haptic. She also points out that historically, since the Renaissance, optical representation has been the norm. Added to this is the fact that vision has conventionally been considered as disembodied, affiliated with post-Enlightenment rationality. It continues to be so—a point to which I will return. According to Marks, optical visibility in the form of a particular photographic look, or “the photogenic,” as Smith calls it, predominates: most digital images, even if they are wholly computer-generated rather than derived from “real” ones, adopt a “photographic look.”²² Hence it can be argued that the majority of mainstream computer-generated images tend toward optical visibility. An example might be the photographic realism of a computer-generated animation film such as *Toy Story* (Pixar, 1995) or the ever-increasing realism of computer games. As Marks comments, today, optical visibility “is refitted as a virtual epistemology for the digital age.”²³

But she detects an “undercurrent of haptic visibility” in recent art.²⁴ She cites as evidence of the latter a particular tendency in contemporary experimental video works. Haptic visibility here is manifest in “the desire to squeeze touch out of an audio-visual medium, and the more general desire to make images that

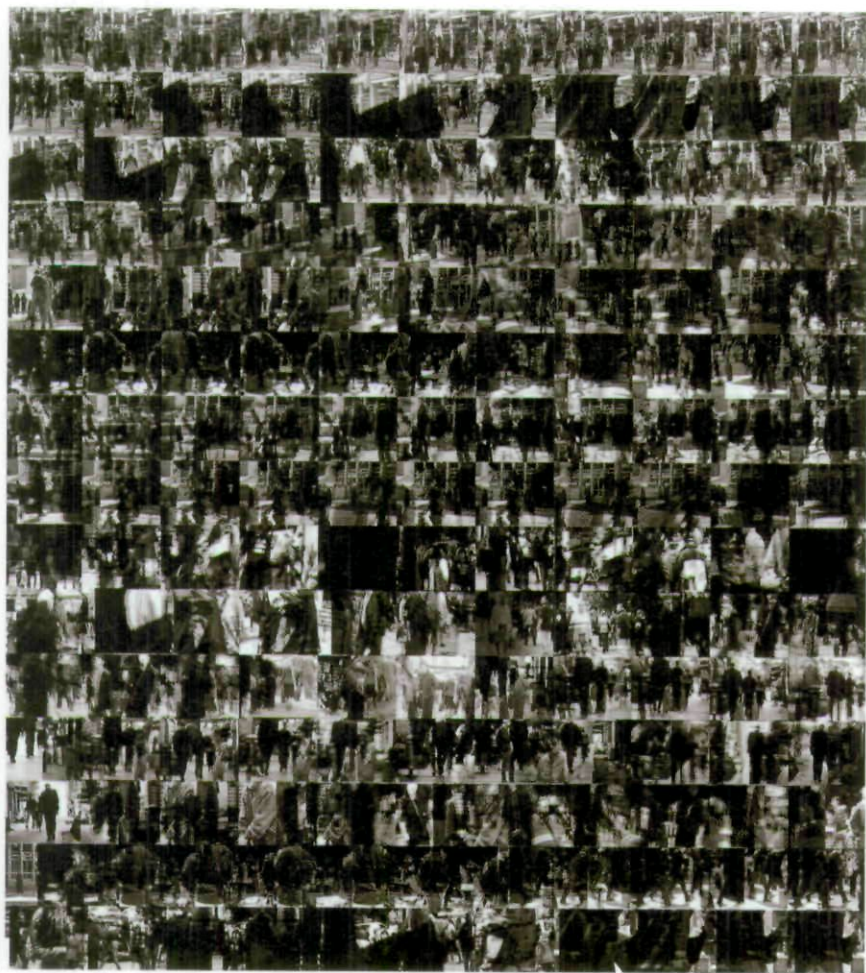
20. Ibid., 3.

21. Laura Marks, “Haptic Visibility: Touching with the Eyes,” *Framework: The Finnish Review* 2 (November 2004), available online at www.framework.fi/2_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks2.html (accessed April 26, 2005).

22. Smith, “Enervation, Viscerality,” 3.

23. Marks, *Touch*, xiii.

24. Ibid.



Steve Lovett, *Uprooted*, 2007, full view and detail, 7-color pigment print on 350 gsm archival paper; 47¼ x 43¼ in. (120 x 110 cm), ed. of 3 prints and artist's proof (artwork © Steve Lovett; photographs © P. Burns)

25. *Ibid.*, 4.

26. *Ibid.*, 16.

27. *Ibid.*, 4.

28. In her web article "Haptic Visuality," Marks says that the "radical potential" that she initially affiliated with the haptic needs "to be motivated by something radical." One ought to add, the right kind of "radical," at that. She is at pains to distance herself from "what seem [to her] proto-fascist, new-age celebrations of feeling, irrationality and primordial ooze" and "beseech[es] those who are newly encountering haptic thinking to keep alive the dialectic with the optical!"

29. See Marks, *Touch*, 8–9.

30. *Ibid.*, 6, 7.

appeal explicitly to the viewer's body as a whole."²⁵ Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988) is one example she cites, especially the beginning of this video "with still images so close as to be unrecognizable, overlaid with a tracery of Arabic handwriting."²⁶ Marks regards this trend as an indication of "a cultural dissatisfaction with the limits of [optical] visibility."²⁷ Thus, in countering the photogenic or photographic, some film and video makers create a haptic image. Yet, as Marks has to concede in her more recent writing on the haptic, a tendency toward the haptic image can also be increasingly observed in popular cinema, advertising, music, and video games, in light of which she retreats from the liberatory force of the haptic, which her earlier conception suggested.²⁸

The qualities that attract a haptic look in film and video—ignoring for the moment the differences of these mediums—are, according to Marks, achieved through techniques such as speeding up of the footage, enlarging the grain of film, changes in focal length, over- and underexposure, and so on.²⁹ Their haptic quality is defined by the effect they create, the look they attract: "Haptic looking tends to rest on the surface of its object rather than to plunge into depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is a labile, plastic sort of look, more inclined to move than to focus." She even refers to it as a "caressing look."³⁰

Jacques Derrida makes similar points in his explication of the differentiation



John Coplans, *Self Portrait*, 1988, billboard created for *Imprint*, Interstate 95, Pennsylvania (artwork © John Coplans; photograph provided by the Print Center, Philadelphia)

Kerry James Marshall, Dotty Attie, Virgil Marti, James Mills, and Susan Fenton (clockwise from top left), ***Imprint Artists' Cups*, 2002** (artwork © the respective artists; photograph provided by the Print Center, Philadelphia)

Imprint, a 2002 public-art project by the Print Center, Philadelphia, included images on billboards large and small, on bus shelters, on coffee cups, and in six issues of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* Sunday magazine. Participating artists included Kerry James Marshall (Chicago), Dotty Attie and John Coplans (both New York), and James Mills, Virgil Marti, and Susan Fenton (all Philadelphia).



Langlands and Bell (Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell), *Qal'a of the Banu Hammad, Algeria, 1996*, from *Enclosure and Identity*, blind-embossed print on paper, image: 29¼ x 28¾ in. (76 x 72 cm), frame: 34 x 32¼ x 1½ in. (86.5 x 82.5 x 3.7 cm). Tate Modern, London (artwork © Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell)



between the haptic and the more usual "tactile." He quotes from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*:

"Haptic" is a better word than "tactile" since it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfill this nonoptical function. . . . It seems to us that the Smooth is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile).

In Derrida's gloss:

What makes the haptical, thus interpreted, cling to closeness; what identifies it with the approach of the proximate (not only with "close vision" but every approach in every sense and for all the senses, and beyond touch); what makes it keep up with the appropriation of the proximate, is a continuous postulation. . . . It is in the "smooth" not the "striated" space that this haptical continuism finds, or rather seeks its element of appropriation, and it is there that it confirms and smoothes out its logic of approach: "The first aspect of the haptic, smooth space of close vision is that its orientations, landmarks and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step [*de proche en proche*]."³¹

31. Jacques Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 124–25, citing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 543–44.



Charlotte Hodes, *Fête Galante IV*, 2005–6, full view and detail, digitally manipulated drawing, inkjet and collage, 51¼ x 36 in. (130.5 x 91.5 cm) (artwork © Charlotte Hodes)

This papercut is a section of the sequence of eight *Fêtes Galantes* exhibited in *Fragmented Images* at the Wallace Collection, London, in 2007. The detail shows the cut fragments collaged back onto the figures.

Marks in turn, following Riegl, connects the historical undercurrent of the haptic to the minor arts—as opposed to the optical in the major arts. Textile art, the ornament, embroidery, weaving, and others invite a “caressing gaze” or a “labile, plastic sort of look.” To these we might productively add printmaking, for it is this kind of “caressing” or “step-by-step” look that the printed surface, more often than not, also attracts — as is readily observed in printmaking exhibitions where viewers press up close to the prints, their eyes roaming the surface, scrutinizing its concatenations, delighting in its variegated fabric, puzzling as to its sensuous fusion (“How is it done?”).

If one speaks of a “haptics of the print,” of what might it consist? Crudely speaking, an image that is based on a “photographic look” lends itself to an optical mode of reception. But the “photographic” alone is insufficient to define the “optical” in print—even if one ignores the additional complexity of how such so-called optical elements are actually employed in the work in question. Although it might be constituted by photographic or enervated images, such a print can be argued to possess haptic elements that distinguish it from a photograph (again, disregarding the complexity of the surface of digital or analogue photographs). The multilayering that is characteristic of the print process, however different it may be in each of the various techniques, and the dragging of (multiple) deposits of inks (of varying density depending on the technique)

Anne Rook, *The Book of 4021 and 4020 (Golden Delicious)*, 2000, clear plastic food container, inkjet prints on tracing paper, each sheet 5½ x 4¼ in. (14.9 x 10.5 cm), box 7½ x 5¼ x 1¾ in. (18.2 x 13 x 4.5 cm), 8 pages printed by MM. Visual Catering, ed. of 100 (artwork © Anne Rook)

yield a surface that resembles no other image due to its particular haptic quality. Of crucial importance here is the support, or the material onto which the image is printed. This also may deny or enhance the haptics of the image. Perspex or glass as opposed to the specific haptics of different types of paper necessarily redraw the haptics of the print.

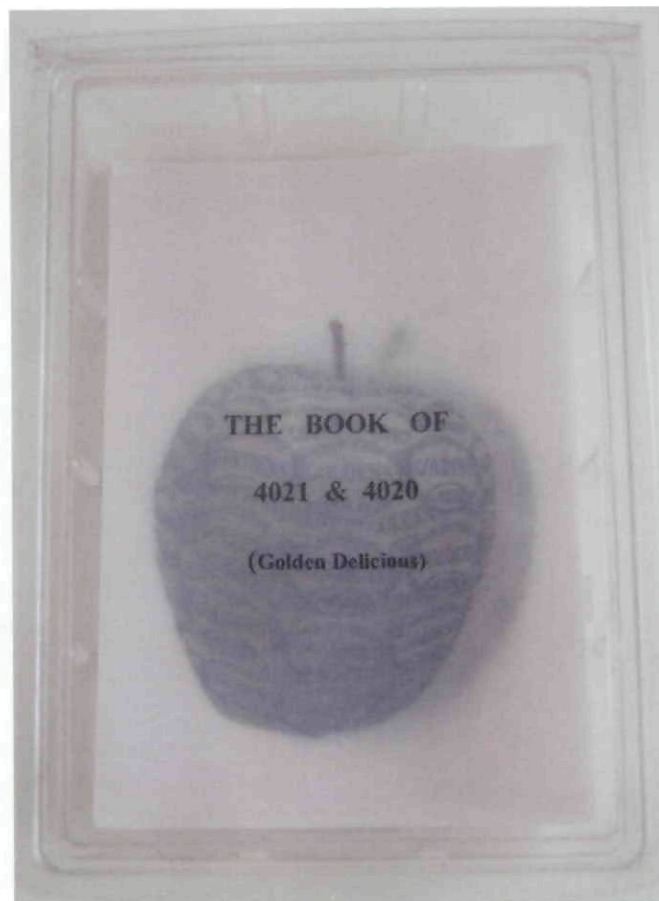
Yet however minuscule or large the differences in actual fact are, in contrast to the enervated images that surround us, the condensed composite that is the print induces a microhaptics that we can characterize as “an excess of surface” or “a surface in excess.” What is conceived as excess varies historically, as we have seen, but the propensity toward greater density in comparison to enervated screen images is what gives the print its haptic quality today. Recalling the historical and relational quality of (the perception of) the haptic surface, it is interesting that, as already discussed, the early debates regarding the use of digital printers and subsequent alterations to them or use of them have been geared to a re-creation of this “surface in excess.” More paradoxically, the initial flatness of such works (in tandem with other enervated images and commercially printed super-flat surfaces) creates a greater acceptance for the more eviscerated art print.

Prints based on photographs may exemplify today the surface-in-excess quality of the printed image or its haptics more obviously than its “straight” photographic counterpart, but the changing status of the artistic print is of course aligned with the changing cultural acceptance of the enervated surfaces of modernity and postmodernity. As already stated, some viewers in the early 1960s perceived the screenprint as lacking the visceral depth and reality not only of the dominant form of art—painting—but also of its printed predecessors. Today, in contrast to inkjet prints, the now-“traditional” screenprint demonstrates a “surface in excess” or the relational quality of haptics, although the gap between traditional modes and digital output is constantly closing, as we have seen. The emphasis on the microhaptics of prints can be seen as an attempt to maintain a competitive edge at both the aesthetic and market levels, while a new print flatness yields the simultaneous acknowledgement of art’s proximity to the surfaces of consumption and the media, of joining the enervated surfaces of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In other respects, printmakers or artists producing prints have opted—as in other fields of visual production such as graphic design—to “dramatize” (Shusterman) a haptic look or create a macrohaptics by introducing 3D elements such as embossing or collaged cut-outs. These examples are only the tip of the iceberg of a macrohaptics in print.³² Such procedures aim to counter the loss of touch and of the real brought on by the relentless mediatization that characterizes the contemporary. In the words of Steven Connor, we “continue to depend upon an opposition between things which are felt to be immediate, original and ‘real’ on the one hand, and the representation of those things, which we conceive of as secondary, derived and therefore ‘false’ on the other.”³³ Yet the shifting history I have outlined indicates that the recuperation of the real occurs even within those representations that are considered the root of the loss in the first place, for the same trade-off between optical- and haptic-image modes that Marks observes in video and film occurs in print. Derrida continues his comments on the haptic as a “smooth space of close vision” (Deleuze and Guattari):

32. For more examples, see Saunders and Miles. In the United States, the Philadelphia Print Center staged an exhibition in 2003 with 3D prints. Rapid prototyping and laser cutting are technologies with 3D potential which artists are hotly pursuing. In the United Kingdom, see research and work done by the Centre for Fine Print Research, Bristol, available online at <http://amd.uwe.ac.uk/cfpr/>.

33. Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 173–74.



There is never any pure, immediate experience of the continuous, nor of closeness, nor of absolute proximity. . . . The relation between smooth and striated, therefore, does not constitute a reliable conceptual opposition, but rather an idealizing polarity, an idealized tendency, the tension of a contradictory desire (for pure smoothness is the end of everything, death itself) from which only a mixed given, a mixture, an impurity comes forth in experience.³⁴

Derrida's emphasis on the impossibility and undesirability of a pure haptics notwithstanding, one can perhaps observe a greater tendency toward the haptic look with its close viewing in the so-called traditional modes of print practice with small-scale (or at least smallish) framed works that are still the criteria for numerous printmaking competitions and exhibitions.³⁵ Yet on examining the variety of print practices today, a much more complex picture emerges. Whereas painting trades on the tradition of its viscosity in tension with enervation (a classic example being the work of Gerhard Richter), prints flaunt their proximity to optical image modes or enervated surfaces on the one hand and open out into a micro- or macrohaptics on the other, more often than not all in one work. One such example of many is the 2007 British Jerwood Drawing Prize winner Charlotte Hodes's recent untitled print, which "laces"—literally and metaphorically—photographic and drawn image fragments with laser-cut forms to create a giddy shuttling between the enervated and the haptic.

Another case in point is Anne Rook's *The Book of Golden Delicious* 4021 and 4020, 2002. This work employs different visual codes and semantic registers to present a dizzyingly complex meditation on viscosity and enervation. With a nod to the optical, the representation of the subject of the title consists of an ostensibly photographic rendition of an apple. Yet the latter is no ordinary apple (whatever that would be) but a constructed readymade, its viscosity fashioned from the multiple, enervated surfaces of a logo. Rook's intricate processes underline the intertwining of the visceral and the optical: "Using a scanner and computer she reproduces multiple sheets of labels, which she then cuts out individually by hand. These are pasted over the surface of fruit . . . and made up into illustrated 'recipe books' or wallpaper patterns, where labels substitute for depictions of fruit, flowers and trees."³⁶ Through their complex sampling of different image modes, these works constitute an acknowledgement of print's irrevocable enmeshment with the surfaces of consumption. Their presentation in the form of a box-book recovers the haptics that the image skilfully alludes to and playfully undercuts.³⁷

Although he is not a printmaker, a public work by the sculptor-photographer Alex Hartley, *Elevation 1:1*, on view in Edinburgh in summer 2007, further demonstrates my argument, for Hartley covered the modernized facade of the former fruit market with a commercially printed, one-to-one-scale replica. The gallery brochure described the work:

The work that exemplifies his practice most comprehensively is *Elevation 1:1*, in which Hartley writes instructions for climbing the Fruitmarket Gallery onto the building itself. The instructions are listed as eight individual climbs. . . . The base for this image is a smooth surface covering the building's front elevation. Ironically, in order to represent this climbing route, Hartley levels the very elements which would be used as footholds for a

34. Derrida, 125 (italics in orig.).

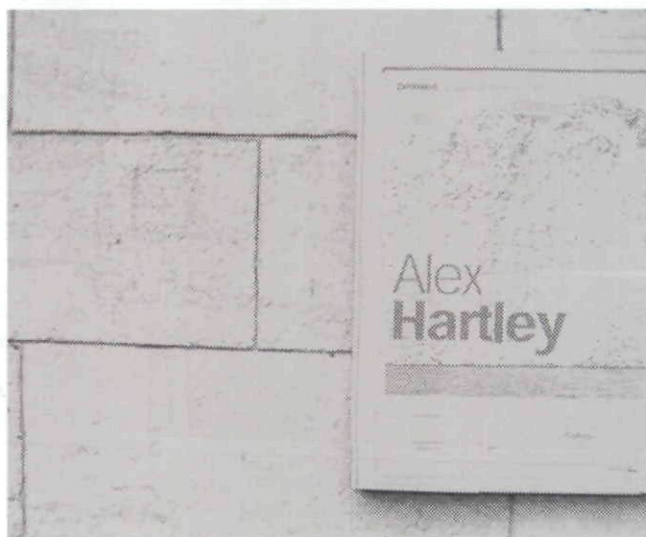
35. The summer 2007 exhibition of the Glasgow Print Studio omitted the requirement for framing but coupled this innovatory step with limitations in scale (56 x 76 cm) and therefore restricted the scope of potential prints for submission. Even if one accepts that some guidelines are necessary, especially for such annual survey shows, it is lamentable that similar restrictions still characterize printmaking competitions and exhibitions. See the Glasgow entry form at www.gpsart.co.uk/mailout/may_ssentryform.pdf.

36. Saunders and Miles, 64.

37. Following Kress and van Leeuwen, works such as those by Hodes and Rook could be considered as a contribution to "a theorizing of a new stage of semiotic practice, namely synthesis, through new practices of construction and production." Kress and van Leeuwen see this "new stage of semiotic practice" or "synthesis" as a result of the increasing abolishment of "recording technologies" (e.g., photography) through "synthesizing technologies" (digital means) where previous notions of referentiality "give way to 'signification' This does not mean that representation has ceased. Rather, the formerly . . . naturalized relation, the identity of representation and reference, has broken down irreparably for the time being." Kress and van Leeuwen, 218.



Alex Hartley, *Elevation 1:1*, 2007, installation view and detail, plywood and printed posters, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh 2007 (artwork © Alex Hartley; photographs by the author)



climb—the building's cornices and pilasters. The method by which the route is delivered cancels out the possibility of climbing it. Hartley's decision to produce a full-scale image of the gallery challenges the conventions of architectural plans, drawings and photography, in which images are always reduced in scale. Seen from up close, the photograph's pixels further emphasize the distance between the architectural image, with its potential for dissolution, and the actual building, with its embraceable, solid mass.³⁸

At first glance, this work dramatizes optical viewing: Seen at a distance, the photographic reproduction of the facade that constitutes the image allows a gaze of mastery or surveillance. The enervated commercial print that "imprints" the building seemingly suppresses the haptic. Yet the haptic is re-covered by the fact that the image becomes the building's skin just as the building becomes the haptic counterpart of the artist should he decide to actually scale it. The text superimposed on the replica architectural features evokes this proximate encounter between artist and building for the viewer, just as the image/building as a whole restages its optical-haptic unity. Besides, the printed surface seen at close quarters matches Marks's haptic look in other respects: not only is it not possible to recognize the image, the pixellated surface requires the "labile, plastic sort of look" mentioned earlier. In looking up close, the viewer experiences the equivalent of the experience of the climber, a kind of vision whose "orientations, landmarks and linkages are in continuous variation" and which "operates step by step [*de proche en proche*]."³⁹

While all looking is now discussed in terms of embodiment, the haptical-optical model contributes to the debate on visibility a definition of different types of looking, one which particularly focuses on the spatial dimension of vision.⁴⁰ It is important to regard the model's twofold structure as nonhierarchical, as Derrida and Deleuze have argued. Marks has also stressed that both modes are complementary, and though in her book she appears to privilege the haptic with a greater liberatory force, in her later article she clearly retracts this earlier position. Here it becomes once again evident that no visual forms per se can be politically radical on behalf of (the right kind of) a political value system. Critical writing on photography in the 1980s provides a case in point. It had championed the implicit critical potential of certain types of avant-garde practices, such as photomontage, and bemoaned the application of avant-garde practices for propaganda purposes by Stalinist Russia, Fascist Italy, and later the US government.⁴¹ The ongoing attraction for advertisers of such visual models further challenges any revolutionary promise of visual form. It would therefore be a mistake to credit the haptic with immanent critical "talent." Nor should it be seen, as already discussed, as in any way superior to the optical. As Marks had to realize: "Haptic images and haptic visibility, in order to have the kind of radical potential I saw in them, need to be motivated by something radical." She adds: "My purpose in theorizing haptic visibility was not to condemn all vision as bent on mastery, nor indeed to condemn all mastery, but to open visibility along the continua of the distant and the embodied, and the optical and the haptic."⁴²

Nevertheless, I believe it is important to consider the haptic visibility instantiated by the surface of the print in terms of a "volitional, deliberate vision," as stated by the film theorist Vivian Sobchack in her exemplary phenomenological study

38. Alex Hartley, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, July 26–October 21, 2007, exhibition brochure.

39. Deleuze, quoted in Derrida, 123–24.

40. Regarding embodiment or embodied vision, an increasing body [sic] of critical writing relates to a reconsideration of phenomenology. This extends and, to some extent, rewrites the social-constructivist and semiotic theories of the 1980s and their often perfunctory treatment of the body. It questions the philosophical separation of body and mind, which has been so prominent in Western philosophy and culture, and examines the implications this split has had for an understanding of vision. See the groundbreaking study by Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); in the European context see the conference in 1997 and subsequent publication by the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn of *Der Sinn der Sinne* [The Meaning/Sense of the Senses], especially the contribution by Sybille Krämer, "Sinnlichkeit, Denken, Medien: Von der 'Sinnlichkeit als Erkenntnisform' zur 'Sinnlichkeit als Performanz'" [Sensuousness, Thinking, Media: From "Sensuousness as a Form of Perception" to "Sensuousness as Performativity"], in: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Der Sinn der Sinne*, vol. 8 (Bonn and Göttingen: Steidl, 1998). Marks gives a brief summary of different theoretical positions that challenge optical viewing with its implied mastery: Marks, *Touch*, 6–7; on visibility see also *Vision and Visibility*, ed. Hal Foster (1988; New York: New Press, 1999).

41. As argued in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From Factura to Factography," *October* 30 (Fall 1984): 82–119.

42. Marks, "Haptic Visibility" (italics in orig.).

43. Sobchack, 93.

with regard to film.⁴³ The viewer “has to bring it forth from latency,” explains Marks. “Thus the act of viewing, seen in the terms of existential phenomenology, is one in which both I and the object of my vision constitute each other.”⁴⁴

While all seeing is embodied, the haptic could be considered as a kind of looking that makes the embodied aspect of vision more obvious. Its volitional quality, or its attribute of progressing step by step, highlights vision’s performative or constitutive, provisional character.⁴⁵

Moreover, Marks finds in this “mutually constitutive exchange” “the germ of an intersubjective eroticism.” She insists that “haptic images have a particular erotic quality,” one that involves “giving up visual control.” By “interacting up close with an image . . . the viewer gives up her own sense of separateness from the image.” Haptic images “move eroticism from the site of what is represented to the surface of the image. Haptic images are therefore erotic regardless of their content.”⁴⁶ Here one may be able to locate some of the attraction—in the original sense of the word—of (not only) “traditional” printmaking techniques (and the particularities with which individual artists employ them) as they force the viewer to “interact up close” and—with the exception of the miniature print—“give up visual control.” In addition, the variety of current printmaking approaches and their specific take on the haptic bring the complexities of looking, the different operations that are involved, and the instability of its performative character to the surface (in both senses of the word).

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44. Marks, *Touch*, 13.

45. A good introduction to the concept of performativity, which has been influential in a range of academic disciplines, is James Loxley, *Performativity* (London and New York: Routledge 2007). The essay by David Joselit is relevant here (see note 3). Although he does not discuss the print as such, he relates models of identity to the modernist and postmodernist surface in works by Jackson Pollock, Jasper Johns, and the African-American artists David Hammonds and Kara Walker. His welcome and necessary differentiation of the modernist surface from its often binary casting within modernism and postmodernism also ties the changes to and of the artistic surface to a “transformation in spectatorship” whereby flatness becomes a “powerful metaphor for the price we pay in transforming ourselves into images.” He speaks of “compulsory self-spectacularization” as a “necessary condition of entering the public sphere in the world of late capitalism.” Joselit, 293.

46. Marks, *Touch*, 13. Marks tentatively identifies a particular gendered quality in the haptic. Not surprisingly, she suggests that it is “a feminine form of viewing.” But she cautions against associating a “feminine quality in particular” with it and “prefer[s] to see the haptic as a feminist visual strategy, an underground visual tradition in general” (*italics in orig.*). Ibid., 7. It would be equally tempting to relate a gender element to the haptic qualities of the print: in its affinity with the surface, its multiple and reproductive nature, and its (relative) marginalization, the print could be regarded in gender terms as “feminine” or, better, “feminized” in contrast to more “masculine” practices.

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